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ABSTRACT

Causal conjunctions that form a grammatical bridge between simple and complex sentences can be either plus or minus causal conjunctions. The category of plus causal conjunctions includes a "because" group (since, as, because of, owing to, due to, as a result of, as a consequence of) and a "so" group (therefore, hence, consequently, accordingly, as a result of that, because of that). The minus causal conjunctives include an "although" group (though, even though, even if, in spite of, despite, irrespective of, notwithstanding) and a "nevertheless" group (but, however, but all the same, in spite of that, despite that). Giving students of English as a second language a list of these words and phrases in categories assists them in reading texts more easily. However, the students also need to know that many of the conjunctions have different meanings even though they look similar. There is no need for the student of English to be able to use all of these conjunctions, even for systematic writing, but reading will be simplified greatly if the causal conjunctions can be analyzed systematically. (MSE)

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± CAUSAL CONJUNCTIONS: AN AID TO READING COMPREHENSION

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Huw Williams
British Council

The following are extracts from Excelsior, published in Mexico City on November 8th, 1984.

Extract 1

> El Ministerio del Exterior español ya tuvo muchas experiencias dolorosas con la CEE. Por esta razón siempre agradece gestos amables aunque estos no cuesten nada.

Extract 2

> Sin embargo la CEE está lejos de llegar a esta meta porque la expansión deseada en términos políticos implica consecuencias económicas demasiado desagradables.

Extract 3

> Por fortuna en México el ejército y las autoridades combaten con eficiencia el cultivo de la mariguana a pesar de los frecuentes omisiones por la corrupción de los caciques.

The extracts illustrate in Spanish what I will be trying to say about English. However, they are also particularly appropriate in so far as the following article is an attempt to apply to English reading comprehension some of the lessons I have tried to apply to my own reading of articles like the above, since my arrival in Mexico.

The underlined words and phrases are clearly of very great

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importance in understanding the meaning of the Spanish text. They and their English equivalents, words and phrases such as 'because', 'however', 'despite the fact that' etc., form a group that we will call plus or minus (±) causal conjunctions for reasons that I will try to make clear.

The most basic causal conjunction is 'because'. This is a plus (+) causal conjunction, i.e. the answer to the question why - a grammatical bridge between simple and complex sentences.

The simple sentence itself can be regarded - to a degree - as a series of answers in a fairly set order to certain questions surrounding the verb.

1.

Who? or What?	Verb	Who? or What?	How?	Where?	When?
Mexico	defeated	Costa Rica	easily	in San José	yesterday

A natural extension to a sentence like the above is to ask a further question - why? This could be answered by a clause:

2. because their forwards were more penetrative

or by a noun phrase:

3. because of the penetration of their forwards.

We will devote our attention initially to complex sentences, using for exemplification a rather simpler sentence:

4. John went to the dentist <u>because</u> he had toothache.

A systematic relationship between the plus (+) causal conjunctions like 'because' and 'so' can be seen if we change the order of the simple sentences (or clauses):

5. John had toothache <u>so</u> he went to the dentist.

Further systematic relationships introduce minus (-) causal conjunctions like 'although' and 'nevertheless' can be seen if we introduce 'not' into either part of 4 or 5:

6(a) John did not go to the dentist <u>although</u> he had a toothache.

(b) John went to the dentist <u>although</u> he did not have a toothache.

and

7(a) John did not have a toothache, <u>nevertheless</u> he went to the dentist.

(b) John had a toothache, <u>nevertheless</u> he did not go to the dentist.

Sentences 4 and 5 above express a plus (+) causal relationship. The sentences in 6 and 7 state that the normal causal relationship did not take place without stating or implying what was the cause of this unusual state of affairs. This is why we call them minus (-) causal conjunctions.

The reader is invited to test for himself the universality of the systematic relationships between 'because', 'so', 'although' and 'nevertheless' by making up sentences for himself and doing the necessary transformations. There are exceptions, but as a grammatical rule, it appears to be as good as most.

An entertaining and useful classroom exercise is getting students to do an exercise of this type:

Join the following sentences using 'because', 'so', 'although' and 'nevertheless':

8(a) He married her. He loved her

In addition to

8(b) He married her because he loved her

8(c) He loved her so he married her

We will get

8(d) He didn't marry her although he loved her

8(e) He married her although he didn't love her

and their '<u>nevertheless</u>' equivalents.

Students can be asked for explanations of d and e together with explanations of sentences even more obviously perverse such as:

He married her because he didn't love her. (A masochist?)

He didn't marry her because he loved her. (An inferiority complex?)

etc., etc.

A class of this type can be very entertaining, but more importantly the basic conjunctions are being thoroughly absorbed and an active understanding of (±) causal reasoning is being fostered.

In addition to the benefits gained from having an absolute mastery of plus and minus (±) causal conjunctions, the student needs to know and have a receptive knowledge of their common synonyms so that (s)he can handle reading texts more easily. A list of this kind can either be given to the students or can slowly be developed by the student(s) singly or collectively as they come across them in their reading.

However achieved, a fundamental list of plus and minus (±) causal connections is going to look like the following:

Plus (+) a)because	Plus (+) b) so	Minus (-) c) although	Minus (-) d)nevertheless
since) as) because of) owing to)the due to)fact as a result of)that as a consequence) of)	therefore hence consequently accordingly as a result (of that) because of that	though) even though) even if) in spite of)the despite)fact irrespective)that of) notwithstand-) ing)	but however but all the same in spite of that despite that

There are of course complications. The student needs to be told that many of these conjunctions, although they look very similar, have very different meanings. For example, compare:

10(a) I lit the fire despite the fact that it was hot = although

(b) I lit the fire. In spite of that, it was cold = nevertheless

As we saw earlier, a causal conjunction (see 3 above) can also introduce a noun phrase.

Corresponding to 9a we have

11(a) because of
owing to
due to
as a result of
as a consequence of

Corresponding to 9c we have

11(b) in spite of
despite
irrespective of
notwithstanding

Two points need to be made here. Firstly, there is clearly a systematic relationship between 'because of' followed by a noun phrase and 'because of the fact that' followed by a sentence. The same holds for all the conjunctions in 9 and 11 and should clearly be pointed out to the student.

Secondly, there is no similar conjunction that corresponds to 9b and 9d other than the nominalization of the causative verb:

12. He had toothache { leading to / causing / resulting in } a visit to the dentist.

However, more commonly the 'so' conjunction is expressed by a verb (like 'implica' in the second extract), e.g.:

13. His toothache { caused / led to / resulted in } his visiting the dentist.

With 'cause' and 'lead' we have also the possibility of using the accusative and infinitive construction:

14. His toothache { caused / led } him to visit the dentist.

There is obviously no need for a student of English for academic purposes to be able to use all of these ways of expressing the ± causative relationship, even if part of what he has to learn is how to write academically. Clarity of expression does not necessitate so much stylistic variation. However, reading will be simplified greatly if it can be seen that some, at least, of the seemingly endless visible signs of cohesion, namely those referring to (±) causation, can be analyzed systematically. A student need not be afraid of the seemingly daunting phrase "irrespective of the fact that" in a reading passage if he knows that it means 'although', and that 'although' means 'aunque', 'obgleich', 'sebbene', etc. in his or her own language. A student like this has made a useful step forward in reading comprehension.